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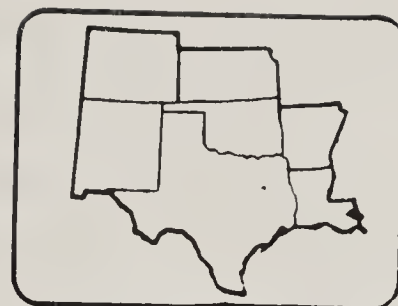


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FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Telephone (214) 749-3331 Bryson

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USDA Proposes Revised Labeling, Composition Standards for "Turkey Ham".

To eliminate confusion among consumers over what is "turkey ham", the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has proposed to revise the labeling on such products and establish new standards of composition.

Sydney Butler, deputy assistant secretary of agriculture for food and consumer services, said the proposal would require qualifying statements on the labels of "turkey ham" so that these products would not be confused with ham made from pork.

In addition, precise standards of composition are **proposed** to ensure that turkey ham products retain the nutritional and taste characteristics that consumers now associate with these products.

Butler said that recent public surveys indicate that approximately half of all consumers correctly understand that turkey ham is made from turkey meat. At the same time, though, a significant number of consumers believe this product is made partly or entirely from pork, he noted.

"We are legally required to make certain that poultry and meat products are not labeled in such a way that they are false or misleading to consumers", Butler explained. "The proposal announced today, therefore, would make sure that consumers would be fully informed when reading turkey ham labels, while also permitting continued marketing of these products to which consumers have become accustomed".

Butler explained that turkey ham--which is fabricated from turkey thigh meat, and then cured--has been marketed for a number of years with increasing popularity. Since 1975, this cured poultry product was



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allowed to be labeled as "turkey ham" without any qualifying terms.

This practice was challenged by the American Meat Institute and the National Pork Producers Council, who maintained that a cured product labeled merely as "turkey ham" would falsely indicate that the product contained pork, and that it was in imitation of a pork ham.

An industry-sponsored consumer survey, and a subsequent one made for USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service (FSQS), provided evidence that a significant portion of the consumers queried were confused about the term "turkey ham" when it was used on a label without qualification.

FSQS also found that turkey ham was increasingly accepted by consumers who have tried the product, and they have come to expect this product to have certain characteristics.

Accordingly, FSQS is now proposing to amend its poultry inspection regulations to establish a standard of composition and require more precise labeling for this product. The proposal, as announced by Butler, would require that:

- Only boneless turkey thigh meat, with the skin and surface fat removed, could be used in fabricating the product. It also defines the curing agents, flavorings, and seasoning that could be used in making turkey ham.

- The product name, "Turkey Ham", would be retained, and both words would have to be printed in the same size, style and color of lettering, and on the same background.

- This name would have to be qualified by the statement, "Cured Turkey Thigh Meat". If the thigh meat is first divided into chunks, or is ground, and then recombined to form the product, this would have to be further qualified with the words, "Chunked and Formed" or



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"Ground and Formed", respectively. All qualifying wording would have to be printed in lettering at least half the size, and in the same style and color, and on the same background as the words, "Turkey Ham".

Interested persons are invited to comment on the proposal. Comments should be submitted in duplicate, before August 31, to the Hearing Clerk, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 1077, South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Further information on the proposal can be obtained from Irwin Fried, Acting Director, Product Standards, Labels and Packaging Division, FSQS, Room 202 Annex Building, Washington, D.C. 20250, telephone (202) 447-6042.

The full text of the proposal was published in the June 2 Federal Register.

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